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project papers

On the Common Christian Responsibility Toward Areas of Rapid Social Change
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FORMATION OF MODERN JAPAN AND CHRISTIANITY

(KINDAI NIPPON-NO KEISEI-TO KIRISUTOKYO)

by

Prof. Mikio Sumiya

(This is the title of an important Japanese book which is summarized in this paper. Prof. Sumiya is a professor of Economics at Tokyo University and a leading lay Christian in Japan.)

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FORMATION OF MODERN JAPAN AND CHRISTIANITY

By Prof. M. Sumiya

(One of the tasks of extreme importance confronting the Christian Church today, especially in the areas of rapid social change, is fully to assess it relationship with the society, without which the Church cannot possibly have any social message relevant to the situation surrounding it. For such a task to be adequately done, an investigation of the subject matter, at once historical and sociological, is essential. Professor Mikio Sumiya, Department of Economics, Tokyo University, published in 1950 just such a study, "Kindai-Nippon no Keisei to Kirisutokyo" (Formation of Modern Japan and Christianity). We offer the following resume of this book to Christian leaders in other parts of the world with the hope that (1) it may help them to understand the situation facing the Church in Japan, (2) it may introduce to the ecumenical circle something of the indigenous Christian scholarship in Japan, and (3) it may further stimulate exchange of similar studies between different areas.)

I.

Prof. Sumiya states in the preface of his book:

"The Christian Church in Japan seems to find itself in an extremely difficult position today. Internally it lacks unity based on firm belief, while externally it knows no means whereby to face up to the rapid social change. In order to show the direction in which it should move, it is not sufficient merely to gaze at its present. One must, from where one stands at the present, look back to its past in order to plan its future. The primary purpose of this study is to make a preparation toward a strategy for the Church's social action, based on self-examination of the present-day Christian Church by way of an objective analysis of its past."

"The Christian population in Japan today consists mainly of the intelligentsia and students. Insofar as they are the intelligentsia and students, their norm of life is reason. Yet within the Church in Japan one does not find integration of faith and reason. The world of faith and the world of academic study constitute two entirely unrelated realms today." In the face of this weakness of Christianity in Japan, Professor Sumiya, out of his conviction that faith and reason at their depth condition each other, "ventured to trace the history of Christian faith in terms of the history of the Church and that, with a thoroughly scientific method, hoping it might show some direction to students of the social sciences who are now suffering from the apparent contradiction between science and religious belief". Thus an attempt is made to study the history of Christianity as the history of the Church at its sociological dimension. This is all the more significant in the Japanese scene where "Christianity has been greatly conditioned by its social relations" due to the fact that the Christian faith has not been firmly enough grounded in Japanese Christians to give them direction from within themselves.

II.

To put the introduction of Protestantism to Japan in its historical context, the author states in the chapter "The Meiji Restoration and Formation of Christian Church", (chap. 1) that in the middle of the nineteenth century,

By Prof. M. Suniya

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Western nations, in search of new markets for their commercial goods and new sources of raw materials for their industry, finally came to Japan, one of the areas then still left untapped, simultaneously from the East and from the West, urging her to open the country for foreign trade. The missionary movement accompanied them as a matter of course, which in the first place rose and grew along with the expansion of the West into the world market. No sooner the Tokugawa government made a trade treaty with the Western nations than missionaries of various denominations began to arrive in Japan. Though the country was now open for trade, Christianity was still strictly banned by law of the land and consequently missionaries could do nothing but to mark time, meanwhile teaching English and translating the Bible as they were learning the Japanese language.

At this time, however, C.M. Williams of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. demonstrated his profound insight into the prevailing social situation when he reported in 1859 to his board: "Even here the power of public opinion is gradually growing stronger. Commercial people who have contacts with foreigners and learn of the position occupied by merchants in the West, are increasingly growing aware of their rights and demanding them. Our time will soon come, and much sooner than one might think at this moment. We should, therefore, hopefully wait for the time to come when the third estate may have fully developed and its opinion will carry sufficient weight in the national congress." Williams, and all other missionaries for that matter, placed their hope in the then rising third class, the modern bourgeoisie, momentarily in alliance with the lower Samurai class in their revolt against the old feudalism. And soon enough, only four months after Williams wrote the above-mentioned letter, the first Japanese convert to Protestant Christianity was baptized at Yokohama. It took, however, thirteen years since then until no more than eleven Japanese became professed and baptized Christians. They were all baptized at the risk of their life in violation of the law of their country. It was as late as 1872 that the Meiji government finally lifted the legal ban against Christianity, and this was done only to improve the position of Japan in international trade. Prior to that, however, the first Protestant congregation was organized at Yokohama with eleven Japanese converts (two of whom, it was later exposed, were Buddhist priests under disguise, sent in as spies). It was organized as an indigenous church from the outset, not to be supported by any of the mission boards nor to be bound by creeds of any established denomination but on simple evangelical faith, declaring:

"Our Church is subject to no denomination but is established in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore its sole standard is the Bible and whoever believe in it and try to practice what it teaches are servants of Christ and our brethren and as such we regard them as one with us throughout the world and love them as members of one and the same household. We therefore call this our Church the 'Church of Christ'."

Shortly after, the first missionary conference in Japan which met in Yokohama whole heartedly endorsed this principle and resolved that in places like Japan denominational competition should be avoided at all cost.

III.

What sort of Japanese were they who risked their lives and dared to become Christians in those days? The predominant majority were from the oppressed groups of the Samurai class which in those days was the intelligentia of Japanese society.

The pressing problem facing Japan at that time was the reconstruction of feudalism which was on the verge of collapse under the Tokugawa regime. The country was divided into two groups of Samurai, one attempting to carry out this reconstruction under the leadership of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the other by way of the restoration of the monarchy. The latter won the day and those who belonged to the former, just as patriotic and as loyal in their intention and zeal to their fatherland, were labelled as "disloyal". They of course were not only dissatisfied with the new regime but were very critical of it, for in their judgment the Meiji regime was just as "absolutist and totalitarian" as the Tokugawa regime. They came to believe that the old feudalism must be completely transformed into a basically new society, which they more or less vaguely conceived as a modern bourgeois society such as they were then beginning to learn of the Western nations. With this in mind, those young, ambitious, and patriotic Samurai, unable to do anything directly or immediately for the country they loved, went to cities like Yokohama, Tokyo, Kobe,etc., where there were "foreigners" from whom to learn English and really to find out what was going on in the West. It was under these circumstances that they bumped into Christianity which instantly captured their imagination. To them Christianity was the dynamic which would transform the Japanese society, and primarily as such they accepted it.

Thus the first group of converts to Christianity in the early Meiji period were anything but the "common" people. They thought they would take up Christianity as a means whereby to reform their country, and they felt that with Christianity giving them strength they could now work with the new regime under the sovereign monarch. But it was not long before they came to realize that there was an irreconcilable difference of outlook between themselves and the leaders of the Meiji government. This difference stemmed from the Christianity they adhered to primarily as a means of their patriotism.

It may not be unfair to say from what Prof. Sumiya's study brings out that they were possessed by the spirit of Christ while they consciously and quite deliberately were trying to exploit Christianity for their own purpose. To be more precise, Christianity once believed, led the believers, as it inevitably does, to discover the meaning of personality - the dignity and sanctity of human personality - which was presented to them as inculcated in the Puritan ethics of the early New England, and was translated in Japan in terms of "absolute rejection of idolatry, insistence on monogamy, and absolute prohibition (no drinking and no smoking)". These three principles became almost synonymous with the Christian Gospel itself in the minds of the Japanese. But more important, the discovery of the meaning of human personality as revealed in the Christian Gospel soon led them to question the very basic presupposition underlying the traditional Japanese ethics, which was common to both the feudalism of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the nationalism under the Meiji monarchy, to wit - the ethnocentric totalitarianism with a caste (hereditary social status) system. Neither Buddhism nor Confucianism ever questioned this foundation stone of the Japanese culture based on the ideology of the primitive Shintoism. On the contrary, they helped to solidify it. Protestant Christianity for the first time in the history of Japan compelled the truly patriotic Japanese to question it. If the new Japan were to be a modern nation like those in the West, then each and every citizen as an individual person must count and be respected. In order to realize this kind of a new society in which equality of all men transcending differences of sex, social status, and all the rest, those forward-looking young patriots were convinced that they had at once to destroy the old system of ethics based on hierarchical relationships between hereditary social statuses on the one hand and to establish a new social ethic based on the concept of the sanctity and dignity of human personality of every individual citizen on the other hand. The basis of such an ethic they found in Christianity.

Thus re-oriented, these Christian patriots came to make a radical re-assessment of their nationalism. Their conception of nationalism thereby made a leap from that of ethnocentricism, essentially and ultimately totalitarian, to that of "citizen-centricism", essentially and potentially democratic. It became the very same kind of nationalism, under the banners of which the Western peoples fought to assert their human dignity in the post-Reformation period. The most outstanding example of this new nationalism in Japan is the famous "Kumamoto Band" - a group of young men of Kumamoto prefecture, unqualifiedly dedicated to the cause of the reconstruction of Japan, who en masse became Christians under the influence of a Captain Janes, ex-soldier of the Civil War (of the U.S.) and a devout Christian. Their objective was no other than the "reconstruction of Japan by Christian teaching".

At the same time, there was emerging the "Third Estate", as had been foreseen by C.M. Williams, in towns and rural villages all over the country. Economic capitalism was still at its embryonic stage, especially in the rural life, and there had not yet developed any serious difference between the landlords and peasants or tenant farmers. The struggle was on the part of agricultural people as a whole banding landowners and peasants together against the oppression inherent in the feudalistic social structure itself. Farmers constituted a single class of people whose welfare could best be promoted by emancipation from the fetters of feudalism. Many of them, and especially the landowners among them were attracted to Christianity.

The same could be said about the "petite bourgeosie" then growing in small cities and towns. There was no great concentration of capital nor industry on a grand scale yet. The merchant class, which for the first time in the history of Japan was "coming to its own", was extremely eager to shake off the chains of feudalism and be completely liberated as free citizens. To them also Christianity was a tremendous attraction.

Intellectually, those who were attracted to Christianity had been "prepared" for it by their previous training in the Yin-Min School of Confucianism, which interpreted the Tsien (Heaven) of Confucianism in terms of a personalized Shan-ti (King on high) and emphasized the absolute authority of conscience of the individual person as governed by Shan-ti and Shan-ti alone. This was indeed the first step toward the emancipation of individuals from the old tribal and family ties, to assert their independence and autonomy, and constituted an ideological preparation "for the way of the Lord".

IV.

To summarize very briefly the next chapter, "Early Meiji Period and Extension of Christianity" (chap. 2) it can readily be seen that Protestantism in the early Meiji period could not help being fully identified with the revolutionary forces which had been at work within the Japanese society. There is little wonder that the Meiji government was inclined to suppress it.

As was already pointed out, the Meiji Restoration was not a revolution in the true sense of the term - it was anything but that. An industrial revolution came after it. It was a return to the pre-feudalistic, monarchical absolutism which was incidentally precipitated by the impact of Western imperialism.

At the same time, the Meiji government had to be concerned with its relationship with the West. This concern precluded any form of outright persecution of Christianity by the law. Herein was a dilemma. The demand of the rising "Third Estate" could not be totally ignored either. In this context

one can appreciate why the Meiji government had to resort to such a strategy as fostering the rejuvenation of Buddhism and Shintoism, deliberately to counteract the influence of Christianity which was increasing in its scope and intensity among the most forward-looking, ambitious intellectuals.

More serious to Christianity, however, was the attack from the camp of materialistic and utilitarian philosophy introduced to Japan from the West, which was grafted on to the Confucianistic materialism. This made it possible for "the liberals" not to resort to Christianity in order to carry out their political convictions. The most prominent example in this respect is Fukuzawa Yukichi, the founder of Keio University and the Jiji-Shimpo (a liberal newspaper), whose battle-cry was "westernization of Japan without Christianity", doing away with all religions as anachronistic superstitions.

The only ally to Christianity at that period according to the author was the Civil Liberty and Civil Rights movement(Jiyu Minken Undo). This movement which eventually developed into an organized political party, and Christianity supported each other and together made a substantial contribution in the formation of modern Japan by forcing the otherwise reactionary government to establish the national parliament. Christianity, the small number of its adherents notwithstanding, thus became a tremendously significant social and political force in the formative period of a new Japan. In the early 80's there were only about 3000 Protestants in Japan, but they were no longer merely on the defensive. The Tokyo YMCA was organized under the leadership of men like Kozaki Hiromichi and Uemura Masahisa; and through its organ "Rikugo Zasshi" and periodically held public forums, they put up a vigorous frontal attack against all manners of anti-Christian forces. Thus Protestantism in Japan was a vital factor in the early 80's out of proportion to its numerical strength, especially in the area of political, social and ethical thoughts. There was also a nation-wide revival movement (a great awakening) starting from Yokohama in 1884 which increased the strength of the Church tremendously.

V.

A period of reaction, however, was inevitably to come. This development is discussed in the chapter, "The Civil Rights Movement and Christianity during a Reactionary Period" (chap. 3). Following the civil war of 1878, there lasted an inflation for several years. In order to put an end to it, the government, among other things, took the policy of turning the here-to-fore government-sponsored enterprises into private industries, with the exception of war industries on which the state-supported enterprises were to concentrate. Many of the government-sponsored industries had originally been financed by the money collected as taxes assessed at an unduly high rate to the farm land, which had practically broken down the whole rural economy of Japan. Many farmers had to lose their lands. Now the government sold out all its industries, except the munitions industry, to pre-capitalistic financiers, such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi, making them into powerful capitalists in the modern sense of the term, at once generously supported and rigidly controlled by the national government. This was a policy based on cold calculation to the effect that the now irrepressively rising tide of modern capitalism had better be put under the absolute control of the government, thus enabling it on the one hand to compete with Western capitalistic nations and on the other to keep check on the rise of rural and urban bourgeosie within Japan. The inevitable result then was that farmers and merchants who were yet economically powerless lost all they had, while the government-supported capitalists expanded their capital investments and industrial enterprises without limit. The economic depression

went from bad to worse beginning in 1882 to 1885, giving rise to frequent revolts of desperate peasants against the government, whereas the landed financier-industrialist class more and more closely collaborated with the government.

Under these circumstances, the movement to assert the civil liberty and civil rights of the people gained vigorous support of the middle classes but at the same time met the suppression of the government which finally broke up the Jiyuto (Liberal party) only three years after it was organized. Government policy of this period decidedly favoured the strengthening of Shintoism and Buddhism to counteract the ever-growing power of Christianity, and the re-emphasis of Confucian ethics over against Christian ethics. This policy was most effectively implemented through a series of directives on education and instructions to the school teachers, culminating in the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 which is the most unvarnished expression of ethics based on the monarchical absolutism. With it the trend of anti-Westernization and anti-Christianity received the official stamp of approval, and the reactionary forces led by Buddhist, Shintoist, and Confucian teachers became unrestrained. By the unscrupulous usage of "guilt by association", they eminently succeeded in alienating the masses from Christianity, and Christians were put in the most difficult position imaginable.

The recovery of the old ethics based on Shinto-Buddhist-Confucian traditions meant nothing less than the return to the old ethnocentricism - which manifested itself in terms of local collectivism based on the clan-centered village solidarity and family solidarity bound by common ancestry. This is, again, the complete denial of the individuality of human personality. Any one who dared to become a Christian in such a social context had to pay the price of social ostracism - which meant all the way from losing his job to being disowned by his parents and relatives. It was one of those circumstances under which Christians had to die in order that Christianity remain Christian. There is little wonder that there could not have been too many converts in those days.

VI.

Almost simultaneously there was another trend within the Meiji government (Policy of Westernization and Expansion of Christianity (chap. 4)). Japan in the 1880's could not afford simply to go back to the pre-Meiji state of feudalism. She was, whether she wished it or not, already a member of the family of nations and had to keep up with the West, as one of the modern nations, in terms of technical civilization, political structure, scientific scholarship, etc. From this point of view, Westernization, by way of adopting Western ideologies as well as commodities and technologies, was decidedly favourable to Japan. Once, therefore, a semblance of political stability was attained at the expense of farming and lower middle classes, the government adopted the unabashed policy of Westernization. This curious mixture of suppression of the civil rights movement, persecution of Christianity on the one hand and agressive introduction of Western politico-economic system, science and technology and even social customs on the other - all by the official policy of one and the same government - indicates the inescapable dilemma before the Meiji government and how mixed up it was in the face of it. The introduction of Western civilization and along with it, of Christianity into Japan was inevitable - which, however, left unchecked would soon have gone out of control. Fearing such a dire consequence, the Meiji government attempted to foster Westernization of Japan in its own terms under its own direction and control. One must remember in this connection that this policy of Westernization was therefore only one

side of the coin. The other side was the policy of highly nationalistic education which included the severe restriction of the freedom of speech, freedom of meeting and suppression of any sort of criticisms of the government and finally the complete suppression by force of the civil rights movement in 1888.

In the social climate which prevailed under the Westernization policy, Christianity, insofar as it did not concern itself with politics, became popularized. Some of the politicians went so far as to suggest publicly that Christianity should be more widely adopted as a most effective means of Westernization. Among the ruling classes or social elite, it became something of a fashion to join the Christian Church, including university professors and high ranking military officers. This development meant two things at once. On the one hand, it made the position of Christianity in Japanese society respectable ; no longer was it necessary for Christians to be ostracized, nor Christianity to be on the defensive against nationalists, against free-thinkers, against scientists, etc., for the Church now had some prominent members of all those circles. But on the other hand, the very thing which made Christianity socially respectable made it dissociated from the lower classes and masses of the society.

At the same time, leaders of the civil rights movement also were attracted to Christianity. Through the bitter experiences of several years, they were made aware of the crucial importance of establishing an entirely new kind of ethics in Japanese society, without which civil rights, civil liberty, and all the things which made Japan a modern nation could not be attained. In other words, they came to feel that purely political approach alone would not do. On these grounds they found their way into the Christian Church. Thus the Church in the late 80's included in its membership these two strange bedfellows, both being of the upper classes of the society and intelligentsia, their mutually opposing political views notwithstanding.

Looking at the Christian Church from within, it did not do half as well as it might have been expected under these "favourable" circumstances. Superficially its membership grew and meetings were well attended, but the Church lost its inner vitality. Christian leaders who had fought anti-Christian forces during the previous period felt that something was wrong with the Church. They reasoned that it was due to the "cooling off" of the faith as a reaction to the great awakening which they had experienced under severe persecution in the early 80's. With all those prominent people in the Church, rulers and leaders of the society, the Church could not win the nation in one breathtaking stroke. This puzzled the Christian leaders. They felt that the Church was asleep. To wake it up, they attempted to foster another revival as a means to wake up the Church so that it might rise up to this God-given opportunity but to no avail.

An interesting development followed. With prominent people from among the ruling class and social elite in it, the Church soon lost the critical attitude toward the government and was ready to make compromises with its extremely nationalistic (in the totalitarian sense) policy. Furthermore, many of those people who influenced the Church to become at once respectable and harmless lost their faith (if they had had any at all) soon after the assurance of the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) and left the Church. On the other hand, those of the civil rights movement who entered the Church never giving up their critical opposition against the state-absolutism of the government seemed to have deepened their faith. Some of them, finding it utterly impossible to compromise their faith with the degeneration of politics, finally gave up their politics and became Christian ministers. Thus in either way Protestantism in Japan had to lose its direct influence in the political sphere of the country.

From this point on, Protestant Christianity in Japan became largely preoccupied with social ethics, with much emphasis solely on the moral reform of Japanese society. As a social ethic, Christianity was little short of revolutionary in Japan, for its person-centered ethic based on the concept of the inalienable human rights of all men, was clearly in opposition to the kinship-centered, tribalistic, collectivistic ethics of the old Japan. Evangelism was done in many instances under the banner of moral reform; and monogamy, prohibition, anti-prostitution, and anti-idolatry were used as slogans of evangelistic campaigns. It was Christian missionaries who started a prison reform movement, education of the blind, and a number of social welfare works. The most important of all in this connection was the movement for emancipation of women and the education of girls. The position of women in Japanese society had been little different from that of a minor. The human rights of women were practically non-existent. It was Protestant Christianity that compelled the Japanese society to recognize the dignity and sanctity of a woman's personality, or humanity of woman.

VII.

Coming to the last chapter "Formation of Modern Japan and Christianity" (chap. 5) the author summarizes the whole situation as follows:

Christianity thus found itself in the midst of "rapid social change" in the 80's and 90's in Japan, where several forces irreconcilable one with another were simultaneously at work. The Meiji Restoration was nothing but a change in the political regime. Neither the political nor the economic structure changed at all. On the part of the powers that be, there was no intention whatsoever to allow any such change to take place. It must be always remembered that the Meiji Restoration was anything but a revolution, either political or social.

With the return to the monarchy there came the foreign trade, in which Japan was compelled by the Western powers, at the point of their guns, to participate. This opened up a new opportunity to the masses of Japan. There arose a movement to assert the human and civil rights of all people which the Meiji government could not afford to ignore. It could not be ignored because it was the political philosophy of the West with which Japan had to associate. In order to put up the front as a modern nation, she could not help at least giving lip service to the political philosophy based on the concept of the inalienable human rights of man. At the same time, that would have destroyed the very foundation on which the Meiji government was established, which was none other than a totalitarian absolutism. The government at its formative period had thus to face pressures both from abroad and from within. Christianity is inseparably related to this political philosophy and movement, which was revolutionary in the eyes of the Meiji government.

In the second place, the economy of feudal Japan was rapidly breaking down, and there had already been a trend at work toward industrialization and the development of capitalism. By foreign trade, this process was being pushed much faster than the Meiji government was prepared for which it felt had to be placed under its control. Industrialization was necessary, and it was synonymous with Westernization. This, furthermore, had to be accomplished within the framework of the constitutional structure of government and yet without ultimately giving up the totalitarian absolutism; that is, the development of the bourgeois society whose foundation stone is the initiative of individual citizens and their freedom had to be directed and controlled by the

totalitarian government to suit its own purpose. Christianity, or Protestantism, which was then being introduced to Japan by the Western missionaries, was again inseparably related to the economic philosophy and structure of the modern bourgeois society.

In the third place, underlying the political and economic trends of the period was the new kind of ethics which was also inseparable with Christianity. Over against the ethics of status-hierarchy of Confucianism, the Western ethics stressed the equality of all people, which was the foundation of constitutionalism. The Meiji government committed itself to establishing the national parliament according to the principle of constitutional monarchy, but it desired to have it without adopting Christian ethics or Western ethics. Herein was their difficulty.

Christianity thus stood at the juxtaposition of these cross-currents, sometimes heartily welcome, sometimes wholly feared; enthusiastically supported by some, horrifiedly rejected by others. As far as the government policy went, by the 1890's it favoured Christianity with a certain restriction, and that restriction was a very important one. As the national constitution promulgated in 1889 clearly stated, "A subject of Japan shall have freedom of religion insofar as he does not jeopardize peace and order and does not behave contrary to his duty as a subject of Japan". Christians were overjoyed when they read this, for at long last they obtained religious liberty! But then what was it that the Constitution meant by "not jeopardize peace and order" or "contrary to his duty as a subject"? Those points were clearly and decidedly spelled out in the Imperial Rescript on Education issued in the following year. This document along with the Preamble to the Constitution made it unmistakably plain that Japan's political structure was going to be a constitutional monarchy with members of the Diet elected from among the people, but the ideological principle underlying it was monarchical absolutism supported by a hierarchy of hereditary social statuses. Christianity was to be most welcome, <u>if</u> it would accept this and serve the nation as an instrument of the Westernization of the superstructure of the new Japan without touching its old foundation.

VIII.

As was stated earlier the first converts in Japan were without exception extremely patriotic. They took to Christianity as an ideology which would help remake Japan, and Christianity taught to them a radically new meaning of nation. From the outset their nationalism was of the same kind as that of the post-Reformation period in Europe which stressed the sovereignty of the state in the interest of the people (which may be called "state-nationalism"). The nationalism which was advocated by the newly established Meiji government was of the kind which absolutized the state making people completely subservient to it (which may be called "nation-statism"). In the years following the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education these two basically different nationalisms came to be wed to each other. From a Christian point of view this meant the Christian's uncritical acceptance of, compromise with, or submission to the absolutism of the Meiji government. From the standpoint of the government it was its most successful interference with the freedom of religion by which the state made an efficient use of Christianity to control whatever radical movement that might arise from among the masses who by then had been placed under extremely unfavourable living and working conditions and therefore could not be expected to be contented with things as they were. Christianity, thus, became a tool of the totalitarian government. If it had any degree of political and social significance that was it, and long ceased to be the eman-

cipator of the people under oppression. Christians who dared to stand up for the cause of the common people or for the principle of civil and human rights of all men, were invariably suspected by the government as disturbing the peace and order of the nation.

With the clear-cut statement of the state-absolutism in the Imperial Rescript on Education, all sorts of reactionary elements, up to then pretty much hidden behind the pronounced policy of Westernization, led by Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto scholars, began to make a concerted attack upon Christianity focussing their arguments on one point, that Christianity was anti-Japanese because Christianity in principle was opposed to the state absolutism. Christian leaders at the top level were neither intimidated nor silenced by such an argument. On the contrary, they vigorously stood up not only in defense of Christianity but also criticized the basic fallacy of state-absolutism. But in the long run the general trend among Christians came to favour compromise in the interest of survival.

One of the factors which fostered this trend was the introduction into Japanese Christianity of the so-called "new theology", or theology of liberalism, in the form of Unitarianism and Universalism. Christianity in Japan thus far had been almost exclusively politico-ethical both in its ideology and practice and had hardly had time to lay theological foundations for itself. The Christian faith held by the early converts were at once highly subjectivistic-pietistic on the one hand and moralistic on the other - which they were extremely eager to put to practice in the political and social life of the new Japan. The new theology with its Biblical criticism and the rest gave almost a death blow to Christianity in Japan when it had to defend itself from the attacks of various other religions. For good or ill, the "old" theology - dogmatic or subjectivistic though it was - somehow made the converts accept that Christianity was something absolutely unique, and there was no "continuity" between it and all other religions and compromise with them was inconceivable. This made them militant and firm, though it also made their position in the society very difficult. When this difficulty was increasing its intensity, there came the new theology for their rescue, showing them "an easier way out" so to speak. It furthermore appealed to the intellect of the young converts, most of whom were from the intelligentsia of Japan to begin with. Almost as a matter of natural course many of them took to the new theology and "liberalized" their Christian faith. Inevitably it resulted in a more accommodating attitude on the part of Christians toward various kinds of anti-Christian forces and made Christianity to lose its "savour". It helped the Christian Church to survive as an institution, but with it the cutting edge of Christianity in the social and political sphere was lost.

From about the middle of the 1890's, Protestant Christians in Japan came to be divided into three groups with regard to their social and political attitude: (1) chiefly represented by the Presbyterians, led by Uemura Masahisa - those who deliberately dissociated the Church from society in the interest of maintaining the orthodox faith within the Church; (2) chiefly represented by Uchimura Kanzo - those who attempted to establish the Christian faith as a purely <u>personal</u> matter over against the trend of churches which lost the purity of faith by too much compromise with society; (3) chiefly represented by the Congregationalists, such as Abe Isoo - those who attempted to put Christianity to practical application in terms of the newly rising socialism to face up to the social issues that arose with the emergence of the industrial and urban proletariat. However well intended, they all failed in achieving what they expressly aimed to do. The first group failed to discharge the Church's social

responsibility. The second group did not quite grasp the Christian faith at its social dimension. The third group under the influence of liberal theology failed to grasp the uniqueness of the Christian faith itself. All in all, the fundamental tragedy of Protestant Christianity in Japan today finds its origin in this historical development of the mid-90's.

IX.

Prof. Sumiya's study, as presented in a summary form in these pages, is based on historical and sociological researches and throws a lot of light upon the development of Christianity in the subsequent decades leading up to the time of the Pacific War. The pathetic path which Protestantism in Japan had to take during the first half of the Twentieth Century, culminating in its full cooperation with the militarist regime which led the nation into that war* cannot be fully understood unless it is seen against the historical background which Sumiya's study so ably presents.

Besides helping the Christian Church in Japan today in her deliberation as to what she should do in order to discharge her social responsibility, this study helps all of us by pointing out how utterly complex a matter it is for the Church to be the Church in the midst of rapid social change. It shows that the Church cannot be the Church in the full sense by dissociating itself from the society which is in reality a political and economic structure. But the crucial question is: How should the Church relate itself to society? Prof. Sumiya's study is filled with warnings based on the bitter experiences of one of the "younger" churches in Asia as it laid its foundation in a period of extremely rapid social change, at once contributing to and conditioned by that very change.

Christians in Japan, with all sincerity and integrity, zeal and enthusiasm, finally failed in discharging their social responsibility because among other things they failed to understand the dynamics of social process, how it shaped itself up politically and economically, and where the power centers were located and whether they were tending to go. Furthermore, they did not have a firm enough theology which would have provided them with a definitely Christian perspective in which to criticize the political and economic realities. The absence of theology and sociology, therefore, looms large as at least <u>one</u> of the causes, if not <u>the</u> cause for the tragic course the Church in Japan had to take since then.

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*Those who do not read Japanese may find "<u>Darkness of the Sun</u>" by Richard T. Baker (1947) helpful on this subject (D.K.)

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